

Identity, relationship, generativity (Genesis 1:1-2:4a)

The creation story gives us a glimpse of the nature of God whom we name as the Holy Trinity.

by [Brian Maas](#)

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“When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was complete chaos.”

So God gets busy. God’s *ruach* blows through the darkness that covers the face of the deep, and God speaks: “Let there be light,” which God then separates from the darkness, naming them day and night.

So the resolution of chaos begins and creation unfolds, with an act of generativity, a separation, and a naming. The pattern continues with the separation of the waters on the second day and the separation of the dry land from the seas on the third.

One could be forgiven for perceiving that God’s great act of creation has fundamentally to do with separation, with division—that from the chaos of all things mixed together, God begins to sort things out by setting them apart. Such a perception would see division as a blessing and separation as the proper order of things. Indeed, maintaining set-apartness would one day become the very foundation of holiness for God’s people.

Yet the pattern of creation, like the identity of God’s very self, isn’t about separation for its own sake. It’s about giving things identity so that they can be in relationship. Day isn’t just separate from night; it’s in a rhythmic relationship with night. Dry land isn’t just divided from water; it exists in relationship with water, and both exist to provide symbiosis with plants and with animals, all of which contain within them the generativity first practiced by God.

Creation reaches its pinnacle in humankind, created in God’s image, formed in God’s likeness, established not one at a time but in a pair, so that they may relate to one another.

In so giving life to human beings, God affirms the model for creation, the pattern of existence, sprung from the mind of and reflecting the very form of the Almighty. Relationship, identity, generativity. These are the characteristics of creation, the characteristics of God.

While not properly speaking an act of natural theology, reviewing the creation story does give us a glimpse of the nature of God whom we name as the Holy Trinity. Within God’s very self, there is identity, relationship, generativity. This isn’t to substitute one modalism for another, to try to align them with the roles of Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer or Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Rather it’s to suggest that, no matter how limited our comprehension may be, we’re on the right track when we engage God as—when we enter into relationship

with—the Holy Trinity.

Indeed, when God's people much later receive commandments about setting themselves apart, it's less about making holy the separation from others than it is about making holy the relationship between the people and the God who claims them. God's intent in creation is clearly to overcome chaos so that relationships may thrive.

In a time of bitter division such as our own, our most faithful practice of worshiping the Trinity might be the simple yet difficult act of renewing relationships. In so doing, we may well find not only the dignity inherent in others' identities and our own but reborn potential for the creative generativity that God embodies, gives, and intends for all. Having been made partners in God's continuing act of creation, our greatest expression of praise may be to emulate the ceaseless relating that is the very essence of God.